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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MAY 05, 2009

Summary: Reports on "Taliban's takeover of Mingora city (capital of Swat valley)" and "siege of 46 security personnel" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Tuesday. All newspapers highlighted reports that the "Kerry-Lugar bill to triple U.S. aid was tabled in Senate." Some major dailies reported that the "tripartite talks in U.S. focus on Al Qaeda" as President Zardari began his 3-day U.S. visit today. U.S. Admiral Mullen's remarks that he was "gravely concerned" about the progress the Taliban have made inside both Pakistan and Afghanistan received prominent coverage. The remarks of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary that the "Supreme Court can review the 17th Amendment as per the powers conferred upon it by the Constitution" also received front page display.

Some major dailies ran editorials on President Zardari's current U.S. visit in the light of recent remarks of the senior U.S. officials about Pakistan. The centrist national English daily "The News," advised that "we need to carve out a path for ourselves and place ourselves in a position where we can deliver a fitting response to the U.S. next time we are subjected to tongue lashing of the kind delivered by President Obama." The second-largest, center-right nationalist daily "Nawa-i-Waqt," observed that "by creating misunderstanding between the Pakistan Army and the government, U.S. officials are engaged in provoking the latter to take over again." Whereas, the prestigious English language daily, "Dawn," while disparaging the contentious views of TNSM chief Sufi Mohammad, noted that "further dilly-dallying on the militants challenge to state authority and not pursuing an effective military and civilian strategy to rein in the extremists will worsen matters." End Summary.

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News Stories  
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"Taliban Take Over Mingora" "Daily Times" (05/05)

"The Swat peace agreement crumbled on Monday as Taliban took over Mingora, the district headquarters, taking positions atop government and private buildings and patrolling the deserted streets."

"Militants Besiege 46 Security men In Mingora" "Dawn" (05/05)

"The Taliban took control of the city of Mingora on Monday and reportedly laid siege to a place which housed 46 security personnel, an official who did not want to be identified said."

"Bill To Triple U.S. Aid Tabled In Senate" "Dawn" (05/05)

"The U.S. Congress made a friendly gesture to President Asif Ali Zardari on Monday, introducing a bill to triple American aid to Pakistan on the day he arrives in the US capital on a four-day visit. Two influential senators - Democrat John Kerry and Republican Richard Lugar - introduced the Pakistan Enduring Assistance and Cooperation Enhancement or the PEACE Act of 2009, in the Senate on Monday afternoon after a long delay."

"Tripartite Talks In U.S. To Focus On Al Qaeda; Zardari Begins His 3-Day U.S. Visit Today" "The News" (05/05)

"President Barack Obama presents his strategy for defeating Al Qaeda to the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan on Wednesday amid growing U.S. concern it is losing the war and neither is a reliable ally. The White House meetings with President Asif Ali Zardari and Afghan President Hamid Karzai are likely to be cagey affairs - both visitors have been heavily criticized by Obama's administration and are also wary of each other."

"Pakistan's N-Arms Safe, Says Mullen" "The News" (05/05)

"Pakistan's nuclear weapons are secure, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen said on Monday, ruling out that they could fall into the hands of Taliban militants, Mullen told reporters in Washington."

"SC Can Review 17th Amend: CJ" "The News" (05/05)

"Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in Islamabad on Monday remarked that the Supreme Court could review the 17th Amendment when it deemed it necessary as per the powers conferred on it by the Constitution."

"U.S. Focused On 'Vulnerability' Of Pakistan N-Arsenal" "Dawn" (05/05)

"The United States is expected to discuss the perceived vulnerability of Pakistan's nuclear weapons with the Pakistanis during President Asif Ali Zardari's four-day visit which began on Monday."

"Obama May Give Bitter Pill To Zardari Over Taliban" "The Nation" (05/05)

"As President Asif Ali Zardari meets his U.S. and Afghan counterparts in Washington tomorrow (Wednesday), President Barack Obama is expected to urge the Pakistani leader for a strong military action against the Taliban backed by main political leadership and for that to evolve the much needed national consensus."

"ISI, MO DGs In U.S. For Inter-Agency Talks" "The News" (05/05)

"Director General Inter-Service Intelligence Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha and Director General Military operations Maj. Gen. Javed Iqbal have arrived in Washington for participation in U.S.-backed Pakistan-Afghanistan inter-agency dialogue."

"Pak-U.S. Talks To Have Far-Reaching Impacts On Ties" "The News" (05/05)

"The sensitivity, importance and far-reaching impact of the top-level talks between the U.S. and Pakistan will almost be unmatched in the history of the bilateral relations of the two countries. Although Pakistan may have difference of opinion over the U.S. global and regional agenda, the existing circumstances does not allow Islamabad to lock horns with Washington.... When President Asif Ali Zardari will reach the White House along with his high-level delegation for talks, he will be walking on a tight rope, as extensive preparations have been made at diplomatic level for talks."

"U.S. Options In Pakistan Limited" "The News" (05/05)

"As Taliban forces edged to within 60 miles of Islamabad late last month, the Obama administration urgently asked for new intelligence assessments of whether Pakistan's government would survive. In briefings last week, senior officials said, President Obama and his National Security council were told that neither a Taliban takeover

nor a military coup was imminent and that the Pakistani nuclear arsenal was safe, said a report published in Washington Post."

"Robert Gates Sees Larger Role For Saudis In Pakistan" "Dawn" (05/05)

"As Washington prepares for direct talks with President Zardari and his Afghan counterpart on the issue of Islamic militancy, the United States is prodding Saudi Arabia to play a pacifying role in Pakistan. While talking to pressmen aboard the flight to Riyadh, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates clarified he wanted Saudi Arabia to help forge a political consensus in Pakistan that it must deal with the threat from the Taliban, al-Qaida and related militant groups."

"Failed U.S. Foreign Policy Allowed Taliban To Regroup" "Dawn" (05/05)

"As acclaimed author and journalist Ahmed Rashid explained how the Taliban fled their Afghan stronghold and regrouped in Pakistan following the American-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, one got an eerily familiar feeling that history was repeating itself. The best-selling author said in very clear terms that the resurgent Taliban - which are posing a mortal threat to Pakistan - gained strength as a result of the failure of American foreign policy in Afghanistan.... Ahmed Rashid was delivering a lecture titled 'Afghanistan and Pakistan: Quest for peace or recipe for war?' in Karachi on Monday."

"2,000 People Being Used By Taliban As Human Shields" "The News" (05/05)

"Militants, in gross violation of the peace accord, were marching on the roads of Mingora city and in other areas, threatening innocent people and the civil administration. The ISPR said that in Buner militants were using 2,000 innocent people as human shields in view of the imminent cleansing of Pir Baba by security forces."

"Swat Braces For Fresh Operation" "The Nation" (05/05)

"Clashes flared late Monday between security forces and militants in Swat as the Valley braced for another possible military operation.... The administration imposed night curfew and also directed all government officials, personnel of the security forces and other civilians to avoid isolated travelling."

"20 More Killed In Buner" "The News" (05/05)

"At least 20 people were reportedly killed and 36 injured in Buner as security forces continued operation on Monday."

"Govt. Buildings, Schools Blown Up In Buner" "The News" (05/05)

"Militants blew up several government buildings and schools in Buner district while security forces expanded their operation on Monday after securing Ambela."

"Taliban Vow To Fight Till Death" "Daily Times" (05/05)

"Calling the Pakistani government and army 'enemies of Muslims,' the Swat Taliban vowed on Monday to march forward till death. 'Either we'll be martyred or we'll march forward,' Taliban spokesman Muslim Khan told Reuters by telephone."

"TNSM Warns Against Further Military Action" "The Nation" (05/05)

"Spokesman of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM) Amir Izzat Khan Monday said that the government should first stop military operations in Dir and Buner and after that the TNSM would be answerable to disarm the Taliban."

"Violence Against Minorities 'Common In Pakistan'" "Dawn" (05/05)

"Pakistan is one of 13 countries named by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom as a place where violence against religious minorities is common and condoned or supported by the government, the annual Report 2009 of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom stated."

"A Turning Point?," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"The task of the President and his team is thus clearly a tough one. Washington has made it quite clear it has little faith in the ability of Pakistan to deal with terror. It has also identified what it see as multiple areas of weakness. Islamabad must at this point consider its options. It can attempt to win back some lost brownie points from the U.S. - or it can choose a quite different path.... For too many decades, Pakistan has followed directions from Washington - sometimes quite blindly. It has at times done so even at the cost of its own interests and those of its people. This must now change. The options are fast running out. We need to carve out a path for ourselves and place ourselves in a position where we can deliver a fitting response to the U.S. next time we are subjected to a tongue lashing of the kind delivered by President Obama."

"Unrest In Swat: U.S. Designs And Duty of Political, Military Leadership," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (05/05)

"Robert Gates' statement that the Swat deal has failed and is a challenge to the government is tantamount to fooling the world. However, there is no doubt in the fact that Maulana Sufi Muhammad and the Taliban have also not played the role that was expected of them in making the peace deal successful.... Statements by Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates, Admiral Mike Mullen and General Petraeus before President Zardari begins his trip to the U.S. are aimed at exerting pressure on the President and Pakistan government to accept U.S. dictation. Whatever Robert Gates has said is reflective of U.S. designs. By creating misunderstanding between the Pakistan army and the government, U.S. officials are engaged in provoking the Army to take over again."

"Militants' Bid For Power," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"Taken in conjunction with Sufi Mohammad's earlier rejection of the country's constitution and judicial system, these comments should put paid to any doubts about the TTP-TNSM lust for power.... The government and the security apparatus' weak-kneed approach has already allowed great havoc to be wrought. Further dilly-dallying on the militants' challenge to state authority and not pursuing an effective military and civilian strategy to rein in the extremists will worsen matters. Time in which the tide can be turned back is fast running out."

"RIP, Swat Deal," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"Whatever the details of the Swat deal may have been it now lies in tatters.... The Swat deal thus joins a long line of deals done with extremists stretching back into the Raj that have failed. Its death will continue to be denied by federal and provincial governments even as its coffin is lowered into the ground. Once again the governments have their back to the wall and the Taliban operate from a position of strength. Buner may have 'almost' been returned to government control; but Swat remains extra-territorial, a landlocked carrier task force from which deadly threat radiates daily."

"A Pernicious Doctrine," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (05/05)

"While extremism expresses itself in various forms and shapes, the views put forth by Sufi Mohammad represent a most pernicious strain of the phenomenon. His ideas which are shared only by a miniscule and highly primitive section of the population stand opposed to the moderate thinking of the Founding Fathers of Pakistan who stood for democracy, social justice, rule of law and modernism within the framework of a moderate Islam.... While Sufi Mohammad opposes any recourse to violent methods for the enforcement of Shariah, the TTP

Swat, which looks up to him as an ideologue, refuses to lay down arms.... This raises the question if Sufi Muhammad, who played the role of an arbitrator between the NWFP government and the militants, really has much influence over the Taliban."

"Darul Qaza And Taliban Activities," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 25,000) (05/05)

"Violent activities in Swat soon after the NWFP government issued a notification to set up the Darul Qaza can mean only two things. One that the Taliban are not in Sufi Muhammad's control and that he has failed in disarming them. And second, that this is all planned [by the Taliban] to put pressure on the government to get more demands met.... Moreover, unnecessary statements by both parties must stop, especially the uncalled for criticism by head of the banned TNSM Sufi Muhammad of Pakistan's constitution, girls education etc must stop as it will only worsen the situation.... "

"Maulana Sufi Muhammad And NWFP Government Must Not Let Contact Break," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (05/05)

"It is the responsibility of all those political and religious parties that have a little bit of sympathy for the Taliban to get active and should urge them [the Taliban] to wage a peaceful struggle, instead of picking up arms. There can be no two ways about it: no individual or group has the right to use the language of weapons."

"Not Merely Land, But Hearts And Minds Should Also Be Won," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (05/05)

"Unilateral military operation is not a solution to deal with militancy and extremism. In fact, it will aggravate the situation, and fan more fanaticism. Some quarters oppose the government's decision of military operation by declaring it as a part of the American war. This negative approach also encourages terrorists and fanatics, and consequently, the government is not able to convince people that extremism is not only a serious threat to our very own existence, but also drives our society back to dark ages. Therefore, it is essential for the government to resort to productive dialogue with the misguided elements besides using military force against those who aren't ready to lay their arms."

"Derailment Of Swat Peace Accord," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (05/05)

"At a time, when the country was facing serious external threats, TNSM should have accepted, of course, with reservations what the Government was offering at the moment. This is because volatility in Swat would benefit our enemy. We believe that there is still time to find a middle way to avoid bloodshed."

"Uncertainty In Swat," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (05/05)

"If the Taliban use the peace deals to increase their authority, they should be stopped with an iron hand. In the meanwhile, contact should be made with the Sufi and talks continue so that a peaceful resolution of the crisis is arrived at because a communication gap will provide room to certain elements that may not want peace to prevail in the region."

"Clashing Interpretations Of Islam," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (05/05)

"One can say that the Madarassa clergy has developed a schism in which the Sufi and the Taliban stand isolated. There has emerged a third variant, that of the 'Mazar' clerics who reject the theology of the Madarassa plus the Taliban brand that the Sufi wants to impose.... The Taliban are not the distant upholders of true Islam in Kabul being pulverized by the Americans after 2001. They are militants who use terror to subjugate communities, kill innocent Muslims through suicide-bombing, and want to replace democracy with a despotic order."

"Beggary - Mother Of All Evils," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (05/05)

"Foreign Minister Qureshi has rightly said that the world will continue to dictate us, unless we stop begging others countries for aid. Mr. Qureshi should better give this piece of advice to President Zardari and his aides, who are for all time ready to commit this 'crime' of begging. Time has come to get rid of this social evil, and make Pakistan a self-reliant and independent country, or else, we will never be able to stand with honor in the international community."

"Unraveling The American Mind," an op-ed by Anjum Niaz in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"Apart from sending the wrong signals to the majority of Pakistanis who openly loathe America and disown the war on terror, the rank and file in our army, navy and air force don't trust the U.S., to put it mildly. The common perception is that some among them are anti-American and would rather see the Taliban take over than have U.S. as our suzerain.... I suspect the reason Gen. Kayani has pulled out of attending the tri-lateral summit in Washington scheduled for tomorrow is the overarching praise from the quartet that perhaps causes our army chief a blush and compromises his position. They'd want to know from him where we keep our nukes."

"One Hundred Days In Obamistan," an op-ed by Mosharraf Zaidi in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"The Af-Pak construct has set back U.S. policy in Pakistan by at least 100 days. And that is if the president can somehow manage to clear his desk of the dozen memos it currently has on it, relating to Pakistan, and replace it with one, single-page, bulleted list that synthesizes the mass cacophony of analysis that is now at his disposal. Somebody needs to Rahm Emmanuel the Pakistan strategy....

Because American attention for Pakistan is so explicitly temporal and myopic that it has no chance of being taken seriously, be it Main Street, or Cantonment Street. The failure of President Obama's first hundred days in Pakistan is that the warmth that is involved in every new U.S. mission to Islamabad seems more show and tell than it does real. This may be a deeply dysfunctional country of 172 million, but dysfunction does not mean disabled. Pakistanis are not stupid. Especially not the ones that run interference for Team GHQ.... The blunt reality is that today's Pakistan is a lot closer to being a model of U.S. foreign policy failure, than it is of Taliban success. Failure here will stain every last spec of achievement by the Obama administration at home and elsewhere."

"No Aid Without Benchmarks," an op-ed by Kamran Shafi in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"I take strong exception to President Obama saying that it was 'very difficult (for the government) to gain the support and the loyalty of their people' because it didn't 'seem to have the capacity to deliver basic services.' I wish someone would remind Mr. Obama that army dictators have ruled this country for longer than civilians, and that it was an army dictator who was in office immediately before this government was elected to office. Why weren't 'basic services' delivered then? It was completely unfair of Mr. Obama too, to place the entire responsibility for what is going on in the country today on the civilian, elected government, when there is every evidence that the army simply did not do its job seriously, and well enough, in Swat."

"Pakistan's Crossword Puzzle," an op-ed by Samson Simon Sharaf in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (05/05)

"The vanguard of Obama policy is the symbolic drone attacks widened into new areas, increased pressure on the political and military establishment and violence expanding to Punjab. U.S. in cahoots with political minimalists of Pakistan is on a dangerous road to curtail the over arching role of Punjab. U.S. will reserve its option of direct and indirect military intervention. The stark reality is that Pakistan's continued policy of appeasement has failed to address legitimate concerns.... Pakistan's role as an

ally of U.S. needs review. The Government of Pakistan must draw its strength from the people."

"The Man that Is Sufi Mohammad," an op-ed by Rahimullah Yusufzai in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/05)

"Sufi Mohammad and his TNSM followers are not much different than the Taliban, who under the leadership of his 33-year old son-in-law Maulana Fazlullah in Swat have played havoc with the lives of a hapless population and forcibly enforced their writ in the valley. The only difference is that Sufi Mohammad's men want to peacefully achieve their goal of Sharia while the Swat Taliban and their colleagues in Buner, Dir and elsewhere in Malakand region are ostensibly trying to reach this objective through violent means. Both groups of militants have the same worldview and are definitely pro-Taliban, though their strategy is different."  
Feierstein